

**SONGS
OF
LIGHT**

**BY
TILLY ASTON**

Miss Tilly Aston, who has been blind since the age of seven, gives us in this volume of her poems many examples of her outstanding genius. Knowing that her sight was failing her parents did everything they could to fix impressions of scenery and colour in her mind and, as she says in her Auto-biographical Sketch, the sympathetic reader "May learn that I enjoy life, that beauty appeals to me, that I have been an eager worker and defiant of difficulties, that I have many loyal friends, that I have loved and lost, and suffered and prayed, and that I glory in the hope of a greater hereafter, when limitations will cease, and opportunities be boundless."

Miss Aston has done much good work for the blind in Australia and has given her time to their service. She founded the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, which is chiefly directed to the care of the aged and infirm sightless, and has also taken a leading part in establishing a library for the blind in Melbourne.

Other works published by Miss Aston include:


"SINGABLE SONGS"

"MAIDEN VERSES" and

"THE WOOLINAPPERS"

5/- net.





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SONGS OF LIGHT

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SONGS OF LIGHT

TILLY ASTON

AUTHOR OF

"SINGABLE SONGS", "MAIDEN VERSES",
"THE WOOLINAPPERS", etc.

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I SING TO YOU

I sing to you, my Friends, of secret wishes,
Of hope and aspiration, love and fear,
Of light that sometimes on my spirit flashes :
But falls the music sweetly on your ear ?

I sing to you of humble inner visions,
When the Eternal Presence hovers near,
That you may share the light and exaltation :
But is the song resplendent to your ear ?

I sing to you of joys that thrill, and sorrows
That make the sum of every passing year,
Of things of loveliness that give me pleasure :
But is the music rhythmic to your ear ?

Yet, sing I must, when life the chord is touching,
Or Heaven's harmonies are flowing clear,
Or nature's wealth of beauty stirs the senses,
E'en though, perchance, I find no listening ear..

SONGS OF LIGHT

ABOUT MY BOOK AND ME

THE contents of this little volume, "SONGS OF LIGHT," have been written from time to time through the passing of many years ; and each little poem is the spontaneous expression of some moment of illumination, or of some image stamped as the result of a definite experience. In them has been attempted no complexity, either in literary form or spiritual meaning, but just a simple out-pouring of my own concept of goodness and beauty.

The poems have been arranged in groups, each under a month heading ; but there was no effort to synchronise the subjects with the season, merely the suggestion that the reader might prefer to take the draught in small doses. Nevertheless, I hope that often there may flash from my heart to his a ray of that illumination which I have felt at times when in contact with loveliness—loveliness of nature's sights, sounds and odours, and of the lavish wealth of human love and goodness. If this opening of my heart enriches another ever so little, then the title of this book will be justified indeed.

Some items with a child appeal have been included, and this, I hope, will enhance the interest of the work. Generally speaking, men and women are juvenile in spots, fond of a tale or a rhyme ; and for such are the two or three fables, especially as I, too, am still child-like enough to want to relate a story to my fellow-children.

So I dispose of the little I have to say about my book. But there still remains the something to be said about myself. Many friends have requested that I should add to these songs a brief sketch of my life, and with some trepidation I do so, chiefly for the benefit of those who do not know me intimately. Of course, the facts that count for most may all be discovered in the Songs themselves by a sympathetic reader. There he may learn that I enjoy life, that beauty appeals to me, that I have been an eager worker and defiant of difficulties, that I have many loyal friends, that I have loved and lost, and suffered and prayed, and that I glory in the hope of a greater hereafter, when limitations will cease, and opportunities be boundless. But for those who would like something more, the following may answer.

More than half a century ago I arrived in a humble family living at Carisbrook, Victoria, the last baby of a line of eight. We were fortunate in our parents, for they had health, intelligence, industry and integrity to bestow upon us. But material wealth there was none ; hence we all got away from the nest in due time, to take up the battle of life for ourselves. I, the youngest, was soon discovered to have the handicap of imperfect vision. This partial sight lasted until I was nearly seven, when the curtain closed down once and for all.

This period of sight was well utilised. My family did everything possible to give me images and impressions. One chill morning, in the small hours, my father carried me out of bed to look at a magnificent comet, and I bless him for the memory of that radiant vision. I saw the earth and sky,

sunlight and moonlight, and the twinkle of the stars. I wandered by the creeks that flowed about Carisbrook, and handled the grasses and reeds, and looked up at the great trees. Just a mile or two away I saw the Bald Hill shouldering the sky, and the green paddocks carpeted with velvety growth after the first Autumn rains. I remember the flowers, and their richness of colouring—the beauties of the garden, bush and plain. Some of that precious seven years was spent with a married sister on the northern plains of this State, with their blue and shining distances ; it will be understood, therefore, that in this period of partial vision there was laid down a good foundation of memories and impressions upon which I have since been able to build my castles of imagination. Not the least cherished of those images are the faces of my own folk, still with me as they were imprinted in childhood, and thus eternally fair and young and sweet.

With this valuable equipment I entered the land of lifelong darkness. At eight years old I was sent to Melbourne for education at the school for the blind. Being an apt pupil, I was pushed on right to the doors of the University, where I entered, but had to leave without obtaining a degree.

From then life began in earnest. I must earn my bread, and to that end I took up teaching work, chiefly in music and singing, or in the private tuition of blind children whose parents preferred that mode of education to sending them to the Institution. In this way I battled on for about twenty years, than I was appointed by the State Education Department as special teacher at the school for the blind—a post which I held for twelve years, until an accidental fall so impaired my

health, that I was forced to retire. Since then I have been living quietly here in my own cottage, on the whole happy, busying myself with reading, writing and hand-work, but never quite fit to resume the burden of my former strenuous life.

Most of us have more than one current in the stream of our daily existence, sometimes with several flowing at the same time. It was so with me. Besides the work that brought me a livelihood, there were two outstanding phases, one an eager desire transmuted into an effort to raise the status of my fellow blind, the other an urge to self-expression in that art form most convenient to my estate—the art of words. Space will not allow more than a few lines concerning my work among the blind. I founded the Association for the Advancement of the Blind, whose activities are mainly directed to the provision of homes and hostels for the aged and infirm sightless ; and I was also a leading spirit in the founding of the fine library for the blind in our city. These movements have always claimed my deepest interest, and are still a potent factor in my life, although I no longer have it in my power to take an active part in their work.

A little more about the third great interest of my adult years, my literary aspirations, must be told. I began writing immediately after the conclusion of my school studies. The first attempt at publication was a volume of poems, which I called "Maiden Verses." That was in 1901, and then followed a good deal of prose. "The Wool-nappers" and "The Straight-goer" both ran as serials in the *Spectator*, and later some historical work concerning the early days of the Wesleyan Church in this State, carried out for the same paper.

Gradually short stories and articles began to appear in other journals, but the appointment in the public service involved a cessation of this work, and no more original writing was published until 1923, when "Singable Songs," a tiny collection of lyrics, was printed chiefly as a Christmas gift for my friends. It received a remarkably good notice from the Press, and the spare copies were sold within a month or two. Later a second larger edition was printed, and sold freely through the efforts of my blind friends ; for by this time my retirement had been forced upon me, and I was without income for a considerable period.

And now I am venturing out with this, the latest and best of my verses. I offer it to my readers, in the hope that it will keep warm the love of those who already know me, and possibly bring around me a few more friends, who will find in the "Songs of Light" an answering strain of joy and pleasure.

TILLY ASTON.

42, RALEIGH STREET,
WINDSOR, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA.

September, 1935.

JANUARY

*The breathless Summer dreams above the plains,
Once billowy golden with the ripened wheat ;
The laden wagon down the highway strains,
With priceless corn the needs of man to meet :
The toiling horses beat the dusty road
In rhythm with the teamster's happy lays ;
For, safe the harvest, bounteously bestowed
On those who labour through a year of days.*

THE SOWER

A NEW YEAR THOUGHT

As each to-morrow in its onward sweep,
Like airy billows o'er the landscape flowing,
Drives the to-days on the eternal deep,
The tiny seeds of action have their sowing.

These hidden germs of all the fruits of life,
Of towering trees or shadow-loving mosses,
Of plants that love the Sun and airy space,
And those who, drunk with moisture, seek the
fosses,

Are scattered oft by hands that heedless move,
Or carried by the wind, we know not where,
Perchance to languish in the dust, or rise
Rich in their gifts, and in their beauty rare.

And when the planting time draws near its end,
How sweet the joy to see the garden growing !
What radiant flowers and luscious fruits to cull,
If good the seed, and generous the sowing.

Amid the death-like hush of starry night,
The white bed where a suffering woman lay,
Her weary eyes upon the window bent
To greet the soft approach of dawning day.
It came ; and, breaking, lit a wall beyond
Where shone the morning-glory's azure flame ;
And she, beholding, knew death had withdrawn
To mystic realms of shadow whence he came.

In field and garden woke the royal throng
Of blossoms, sweet with nectar for the bees,
The vibrant air was full of honey-song
From clover pasture and from orchard trees.
“ Thank the dear Earth for flowers, and the Heaven
“ Whose glow hath filled this chalice for our needs ! ”
And as they worshipped, still they gathered more
For their own kind, and those who sowed the seed.

The Elder, with its cap of snowy bloom,
Bent o’er the highway, and its friendly shade
Fell like cool water on the glaring track
Traversed by many a weary cavalcade :
And there the sheep would stay to crop the herbs ;
And pensive cattle shelter from the heat ;
And there the rider oft would draw his rein,
And bless the Elder for this respite sweet.

“ Great pines I’ll plant,” the wise man said, and lo !
Plantations rose, and forests waved and sang.
The wise man died: but in the wood was heard
The screech of saw, the axe’s mellow clang :
For men were seeking warmth of blazing hearth,
And homely shelter for the Winter-tide,
The bench and table, weapon, tool and toy—
And all of these the wise man did provide.

The Poppy glowed and curtsied in the wind,
The SISTER FRIVOLOUS among the flowers ;
And men delighted in her flutterings
That touched with pleasure idle, heedless hours :
Another came, and, scornful of her charms,
Wrung the life juices from her bruised breast,
And sent them forth to banish mortal pain,
And bring oblivion to the mind distressed.

The seeds that fall may yield a flower of hope,
Or sweets to bless us through the sunless days;
A spreading tree may flourish by the road
Where man and beast may halt, and give God
praise.

The son of wisdom, looking into time,
May do his planting for the future weal,
The pleasure-lover, with his poppy field,
May all unwitting sow the drugs that heal.

But when the planting time draws near its end,
How sweet the joy to see the garden growing !
What radiant flowers, what luscious fruits to cull,
If good the seed, and generous the sowing.

A SONG

The Summer sky said to the sea :

“ I spread out above thee,
“ Because Dear, I love thee,
“ My azure and purple delight,
“ With fleecy clouds sailing,
“ And silver mists veiling
“ The gleam of my canopy bright ;
“ All blessings bestowing
“ Upon thy face, glowing
“ With smiles that are answers to mine,
“ I'll give thee my rarest,
“ I'll make thee my fairest !
“ All joy that is mine shall be thine ! ”
So is it with man when he wooeth a maid ;
In colours of light is the future portrayed.

And the sea murmured unto the sky :

“ In all thy joys sharing,
“ Upon my breast bearing
“ Thy glories of morning and noon,
“ Yet, when the night falleth,
“ And dim silence calleth
“ In vain for the stars and the Moon ;
“ And when the clouds weeping
“ In sorrow are steeping
“ The dull, dreary land at my side,
“ I'll still be thy dearest,
“ Thy best and thy nearest,
“ Thy moments of woe to divide ! ”
So answers the maiden, with love in her eyes ;
For love shines, though rain-clouds may cover
the skies.

DEAR LAND OF HOPE AND YOUTH

CANBERRA, MAY 1927

Dear Land of Hope and Youth,
Outspread beneath the Hallowed Constellation !
Pledge we to build on truth
For God and thee a strong and worthy nation.

Upon thy lap are treasures rare,
For all who come confiding ;
Above the sweet and radiant air,
Below life's bounties hiding.

The young may joy, the old may rest,
The strong man strive, believing ;
And beauty is the constant guest,
Their sober tasks relieving.

For here is space to live and grow,
Love's rich behest pursuing ;
Where men may reap more than they sow,
And glory in so doing.

Who dares withhold from thee his best,
His burning heart's endeavour ?
O wide new world, Australia blest !
My home, my country ever !

Dear Land of Hope and Youth,
Outspread beneath the Hallowed Constellation !
Pledge we to build on truth
For God and thee a strong and worthy nation.

COMMUNION

I need no eyes to tell me
That he is passing by ;
I need no voice nor footstep
To say that he is nigh.

No touch nor tender whisper,
No clasp of loving hand,
Gives warning that my dearest
Close by my side may stand.

My very soul is listening
For his soul's silent word :
There needs no wakeful senses
To make that whisper heard.

THE PIONEERING FAIRY

There was once a robin fairy had his home beside
a rill,
With a foxglove for his castle, and his lodge a
daffodil :
But the joy of life had vanished, and he brooded
night and day,
For there's not a spot in England where the fairy
folk can play.
“ Oh alas, and woe,” he murmured, as he languished
in the grass,
“ Not a soul believes in fairies, so we vanish as
they pass !
“ Not a prank or frolic left us, not a dance or
daisy fête !
“ Not an elfin glade in England—so we all must
emigrate ! ”
Away and away !
Where the west-going day
Will scatter noon gold while black midnight here
reigns :
Away and away !
There is room for the fay
In sunlit Australia,
The Southland, the Sweet Land,
The land of lone forests and far-spreading plains.

So he stepped aboard a swallow, and across the
world he flew,
Landing safely in a gully where the shady treeferns
grew ;
And the creek a welcome sang him, like his little
rill at home,
With new wonder-music rolling from each euca-
lyptus dome.
“ How I miss the nodding foxglove ! How I
long for daffodils !
“ But there’s gum and heath and wattle, and rare
orchids on these hills ! ”
So he settled there ; and, children, if you doubt
my little song,
Go and find my robin fairy ’mid the hills of
Dandenong.
Away and away,
Where the west-going day
Will scatter noon gold while black midnight here
reigns :
Away and away,
There is room for the fay
In sunlit Australia,
The Southland, the Sweet Land,
The land of lone forests and far-spreading plains.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—

THE YELLOW BOX

By the dusty roadside gleaming
In its cloud of creamy white,
See the yellow box tree, dreaming
In the mellow Summer light !
As the blossoms nod and curtsy
To their guests, the myriad bees,
What a honeyed breath is wafted
On the lisping Summer breeze !

FEBRUARY

*While Summer lingers in the stubble field,
We seek the shadows near the water cool,
Which murmurs round the rock that will not yield,
Or spreads itself in gravel-bordered pool :
All nature's minstrelsy is round us here,
The whispering leaves, the song of bird and stream ;
Blest home of peace, that brings the gift so dear,
Leisure to laugh and love, to rest and dream.*

THE MUSIC I HEAR

I've listened while the bards of northern lands
Tuned their harmonious harps to burning song ;
I've heard the tear-sweet music from the strands
Where Virgil fired the tongue.

The sun-gilt melody of Hindu seer
Has lit my fancy with its glowing flame ;
And plaintive psalms of Judah on mine ear
Have made their holy claim.

The golden ring of memory is impearled
With many a beauteous gem, cast at my feet
By fervid singers of the newer world
Whose hearts to freedom beat.

Amid them all another song awakes,
To meet my inner ear with strange delights ;
For through the ferny vales the music breaks,
And, stealing o'er the heights,

It loiters where the ruddy-blossomed gums
A lifelong vigil keep upon the slope,
And where the wild bee at its labour hums
A wordless hymn of hope.

The airs that slumber on the mountain side
Sigh o'er the sweetness of this new-born strain,
And breathless whispers through the grasses glide,
Upon the lonely plain.

The beating ocean and the murmuring stream
Have learned their portion of the harmony ;
Soft melody unspeakable doth dream,
Australia, over thee.

But why should I alone these raptures feel?
Sweet, many-voicèd song, the words bestow,
That to the tuneless throng I may reveal
The precious things I know!

O for the power to touch the hardened heart!
To lift the veil from beauty's hidden face!
To catch the birds of fancy, as they dart
From many a secret place!

I would impart the calm that I have found
In tea-tree bowers upon the bay-washed shore,
When present days by blessed hope are bound
To the great Evermore.

The strength I gather from the rolling hills,
The constancy in Sun and stars above,
The might that in the throbbing ocean thrills,
The human heart of love.

The ecstasy of nature's gladsome hours,
The breath reviving of the happy Spring,
The sensuous sweets of birds and streams and
flowers—

These are the notes I sing.

O Friendly Fellow, hear this song of mine!
And what thy greatest need, that same possess;
Distil that fragrance from each simple line
That brings thee happiness.

A PLACE OF REST

Come sweeping down the hillside,
O cool and crystal stream !
For here the pool lies waiting
To give you shade and rest !
Come leaping, laughing downward !
There's time enough to dream,
When you have hushed your hill song
Upon the pool's wide breast.

And, like the mountain streamlet,
O hasten, Love, to me !
For here my bosom waits thee,
A home of peace and bliss !
And, like the pool's deep water,
I'll ever shelter thee,
Our hearts together beating,
Our lips one clinging kiss.

THE NATIVE THRUSH

In the scented gully sitting,
Where the shade is spread,
I did hear the native thrush,
Hidden 'mid the fern and bush,
Singing overhead :
And the little bird unwitting
Did the sound to sweetness wed.

And as oft the note went ringing
From the boughs on high,
He would hush his melting song,
Waiting through a silence long
For his mate's reply.
And the wind would murmur, singing
To the listening sky.

Then the answer softly stealing
Far and far away,
Would awake my bird's delight
Into yet a sweeter flight
Of the love-born lay.
Oh, the rapture floating, peeling
Through that happy day.

Dearest one, my love o'erflowing
Makes me like the bird !
For, my singing I abate,
And in blissful silence wait
For your whispered word :
Then my song, each moment growing,
In delight, is heard.

IF LIFE ON EARTH WERE ALL

If life on Earth were all, Love,
And death the end of man,
If God were not on high, Love,
And Heaven an empty span ;
Had duty never made a claim,
And had I never heard love's name,
Since you have not a thought to give,
'Twere better far to die than live.

But life is not our all, Love,
This little life on Earth ;
And death is but a throe, Love,
 Of higher, nobler birth !
And God has set a task for me,
A schooling for eternity ;
So I must answer duty's claim,
And serve all men for love's dear name.

THE KING'S FRIEND

The Monarch gazed on the rigid form
Of his well belovèd hound,
As, silent and still, it lay at length
On the daisy-spangled ground.

The noble head that was wont to rest
Upon his royal knee,
The limbs that sped with a strong, light spring,
O'er the heath and woodland free :

The soft, brown eyes, that would always shine
When the master's hand caressed,
And the loving heart that would pant for joy,
In the master's presence blest :

All wrapt in a clod of lifeless clay
That would never more respond
To the kindly glance or the rousing call,
Or the touch of the fingers fond.

And the King was sad, as he stood and gazed
Where his smooth-haired favourite lay ;
And the hand that had often stroked his head
Now brushed the hot tear away.

“ Your Majesty grieves o'er a servant gone,
“ For a faithful hound was he ;
But here in the palace are servants more,
“ As faithful and loyal to thee ! ”

But the King he turned, and in wistful tones
He answered the courtier's word :
" 'Tis true ; full many my servants are,
" But say, have you never heard,

" That kings on their thrones have need of more
" Than the wise and strong and brave ?
" For, more than service, and more than faith
" Doth the heart of the monarch crave.

" And this, my friend, with his dumb love given,
" Did that we yearn for bring ;
" He loved me, his lord, in truth and trust,
" Nor ever knew I was King."

FLOWER-THOUGHT—GUM TIPS

Two giant gums with planted feet,
The rushing creek between,
Spread grasping branches overhead,
A tangled, leafy screen.
They roared, " Bow down, thou Boaster, bow !"
They wrestled might and main ;
But Winters come and Summers go,
And wrestling still they strain.

MARCH

*Then March lets loose her band of harlequins,
The winds that riot through the forest trees,
And send the ripened fruit in airy spins
With fleets of leaves that sail the Autumn breeze :
We haste the rosy apples to retrieve,
The creaking baskets to the handles fill ;
And russet foliage is all we leave
To whirl and frolic at the March winds' will.*

LEAVES

TO A FRIEND ON THE DEATH OF HER MOTHER

Another leaf from life's wide-spreading tree,
Thy mother, Friend of mine, has blown from thee !
So like the Autumn leaf in garb of brown
That on the breezy billow fluttered down
To rest upon my lap : the lovely thing,
So tender green, so fragile in the Spring,
Now holds a richer and maturer grace,
With hues of sod and Sunshine on its face.

It did not fall until its work was done,
Until full beauty was completely won :
Within my hand it lies, a finished page,
Illuminated by the gold of age.
The living sap had ceased to find its way
To where the precious Sunlight waiting lay ;
And, since the leaf could no more service render,
It kissed the tree, and sank in slumbers tender.

With robe dark-tinted, from the brown Earth drawn,
And mantle trimmed with colours of the dawn,
This little leaf, in search of endless rest,
Than Spring of youth has made old age more blest :
For thy belovèd one, then, be content !
Her days in sweet and tranquil service spent,
Have grown more radiant with the coming night
That is the prelude to eternal light.

THE CALL OF THE AGES

What was the call that, echoing through the halls
Of dim, subconscious memory, did fire
To cross the deep our pioneering sire,
Here to build homes, and learn life's way anew,
Steeped in our Austral heavens' translucent blue?

Was it the hard, insistent voice of gold?
Surely that voice can lure like whisp'ring stream
Or drive, exultant as the tempest's scream,
Or play enchanter; or with captor's chain
Bind the unwary to remorseless pain.

Was it the call of Empire's clarion song?
Oh to be great in other nations' eyes!
Oh to be ruler under many skies!
To feel ambition blaze and power illumine
The deeps inscrutable of future gloom!

Or did that secret magic in the blood
Enter the soul, and bid it wander forth,
Wander to east or west, to south or north,
No matter whither, ever onward press,
To find new Edens in the wilderness?

Or did a love of freedom send them forth?
The scorching finger of injustice burns,
Likewise the law which creed of other spurns:
For who can be a man, and curb his prayers
As state forbids, or prelacy declares?

Perchance these mingled voices woke and stirred,
Like the hushed waves that kiss and quit the shore,
Whose velvet fingers, passing o'er and o'er,
Crumble the stubborn rock to shifting sand,
And throw moist mantles on the shrinking land.

But high, triumphant, through the ages rings
A mightier strain, a trumpet-toned behest,
A hymn æonic, swelling o'er the rest :
It is the voice of destiny supreme,
The voice of God, the song of ancient Time.

“ See yonder beckoning continent, that dreams
“ Untilled, uncultured, under radiant skies !
“ There must ten thousand thousand homes arise,
“ Where languishes a rude and aimless race,
“ Forfeit through sloth and ignorance their place ! ”

And lo ! Our sires obeyed, our mothers bowed,
Facing uncharted sea and untried shore ;
And by the lone creek, 'mid the forest's roar,
Planted the seeds of nationhood in tears,
And yearnings, and privations, through the years.

And still that mighty call is ringing clear !—
On, till the land be filled from end to end,
Strength and endeavour spend, unceasing spend,
Until at last, at that supreme command,
We rise, a people worthy of our land.

THESE HANDS OF OURS

“GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

These hands of ours for labour wrought,
With strength to build a temple tower,
And skill to paint the Sunset hour,
Have in their daily duties sought
The gifts for man by God outspread :
Look on these hands, O Lord, and send
This day our daily bread !

With weary feet we take the way
Which leads to desk or bench or mart,
And face the toil with fainting heart,
The ceaseless round from day to day.
Whatever path our feet may tread,
Walk with us, Lord of Life, and send
This day our daily bread !

The grinding toil of harvest field,
The numbing throb of great machines,
The vast expanse of human schemes,
Have little more than pain to yield :
But since Thy children must be fed,
Smile on our labour, Lord, and send
This day our daily bread.

LOVE'S REWARD

My heart to thine, Belovèd,
Draws ever nearer ;
My love for thee is shining
Still ever clearer :
Thy voice is joy to me,
Thy presence ecstasy !
Even my thoughts of thee
Grow ever dearer.

Thou art my Spring, that waketh
Life to renewing ;
Thou art my morn, that crieth,
“ Up, and be doing ! ”
Thou art my Sun and cloud,
Thy pain my night's dark shroud :
Thy joys my noonday proud,
Sweet pleasures strewing.

Why sings my heart, Belovèd,
For thy heart yearning ?
Is it the hope of winning
Thy love's returning ?
No ; 'Tis my happiness
Only to love and bless !
This joy, nor more, nor less,
Is my song's earning.

THE CRICKETS AT EVE

When the soft evening of Autumntide balmy
Steals from the east over garden and street,
Often I loiter where grape-vine and roses
Flood with their incense my leafy retreat :
Dreams of the love which each maiden heart covets,
Visions of hope and of glory I weave,
Till from the earth 'neath the vines and the roses
Comes the shrill song of the crickets at eve.

Soft is the note of the cricket at Sunset ;
Shyly he touches his quivering string,
Faintly, then pausing, he waits for an answer
Out from some neighbouring garden to ring :
Then, when the dusk has unveiled a few star-points,
List to his mandoline's monotone clear !
Taking its part in the symphonic cadence
Rendered by crickets in flower-beds near.

Trill on, O trill on, until the night falling,
Hushes your song with its rhapsodic measure !
Trill on ! The peace of the evening recalling
After day's toil or its chalice of pleasure.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—
THE SARSAPARILLA

The purple sarsaparilla shroud
About the dead tree clings,
As hangs the royal silken pall
About the bier of kings :
Hark ! The solemn funeral drum
Of bittern sounding deep !
Departed is the mighty gum—
Weep, Forest Brothers, weep !

APRIL

*A week ago the raindrop's downy tread
Stole o'er the land, and now the pastures wide,
That lay like mummy, withered, dry and dead,
Are flooded with the Autumn's verdant tide :
O lovely April, bringing life for death,
The sweet, young grass, the mushroom's snowy tent !
We take the road again with fuller breath,
Our spirits hopeful, and our hearts content.*

TO MELBOURNE

PART I—THE BEATING HEART

A river rising in the misty hills,
With curves voluptuous through the valley
sweeping,
Sang softly, with its tributary rills,
The song by nature given to its keeping :
And louder swelled, where rock and cascade lay,
And onward through the grassy delta gliding,
Till, in the grander music of the bay,
The river's song found hiding.

The lithe and graceful native roamed the land,
And took his toll of river, bush and plain ;
And only slightest signs of human hand
Betrayed the presence of the human brain !
The call of thrush, the kookaburra's mirth,
The organ bass of wind through forest breaking,
Were lullabies of this fair spot of Earth,
In dreams before its waking.

Then, like the seagull o'er the shining flood
From southward came, beneath the straining sail,
Those robust spirits, first of British blood,
To build and barter in this Sunlit vale :
And soon was heard the sound of home and mart,
The tramp of horses, and the sheep's sad bleating ;
And Lo ! The new-born city's infant heart
Began its vital beating.

PART 2—THE GOLD SONG

The laden ships come sailing
With men from many a strand,
To seek the riches golden
That wait the delving hand.

The fair young maiden city
Has welcome in her eye,
But all those eager thousands
Unheeding pass her by.

And e'en her erstwhile lovers
Have joined the passing throng,
For who could stand against the lure
Of gold's enchanting song ?

“ Oh, come away to hillsides,
“ To gully deep and cool,
“ Where streams o'er gravel flowing
“ Sink in the fern-fringed pool ;
“ For there, the hidden treasure,
“ The gleaming, yellow hoard,
“ The means to love and pleasure,
“ Is waiting ready stored ! ”

The Siren voice they follow,
And, scorning fears and toil,
Pierce Mother Earth with many wounds
From whence they draw the spoil.

But soon their hearts are turning :
Their first love, Oh, how sweet !—
They bring their precious winnings,
And pour them at her feet.

They crown her queen, and bless her,
With all the gifts that be,
Of learning, art and story,
Of commerce, justice, glory,
Fruits culled through ages hoary
From wisdom's ancient tree.

PART 3—INVOCATION

And now she stands full-grown, with powers
mature,
No longer troubled by her childhood's fears,
Her court established, and her kingdom sure,
Her face set bravely to the future years :
Her children toil and love, and fall asleep ;
Yet, in her ever widening embraces,
They seek to climb the paths of progress steep,
That lead to nobler spaces.

Great Lord of Heaven, Father of mankind,
Brood o'er this city like a nesting dove,
That we who dwell therein may ever find
Fresh-welling fountains of thy tender love !
O cleanse us from the sins of perished Tyre,
The touch of chilling greed or scorching passions,
The sins of the oppressor, thief and liar
Which wanton self-love fashions.

Yea, we would be a people strong and clean,
Revered of others, hopeful, brave and free,
With conscience bright, and understanding keen,
The essence of our actions only Thee !
O God, if Thou be with us, all is well !
We kneel Thy holy presence to implore ;
Come hither, Lord, and here among us dwell
Till years shall dawn no more ! Amen.

A NEW FABLE

The little seed lay in his earthy bed,
Where long he had snugly slept,
Ne'er heeding the glowing Sun overhead,
Nor the winds that above him swept.

One morning in April he woke to hear
The sweetest and pleasantest sound,
The pattering drops of the Autumn rain
That fell on the dusty ground.

The little brown blanket was thrust aside,
And up came a little green head,
And loudly he called to his neighbour seeds
To hurry, and get out of bed.

"Hey, Brothers, get up!" he shouted with glee,
"For list how the mother is calling!
"How softly she sings to her children asleep,
"And her song is the Autumn rain falling.

"Once, Brothers, when I was a grain in the ear,
"I heard a quaint story told,
"How grew the tall trees at the sound of a voice,
"The voice of a singer of old.

"And why should we not at the music awake,
"When Mother, our Mother, is singing,
"And over the Sunshine, to spare our young
 blades,
"A curtain of silver mist flinging?"

That morning the butterflies heard a queer sound,
As over the paddocks they flew ;
The earthworms came out of their burrows to see
The reason for such an ado.

For thousands of wheaten grains turned in their
beds,
And sent up the tiny green blade,
Nor were they content till their mantle of green
Above the brown furrows was laid.

But one lazy fellow was fond of his bed,
And lingered long after the rest,
Consoling himself that this last little nap
Of all his long sleep was the best.

And when he got up, all the others had sprung
The length of a fully-grown ear,
And, strive as he would, he was always behind,
And then the hot harvest drew near.

Ah then was his folly in daylight revealed !
For each of his neighbours had done
The task which is given the seed of the field,
While he, to his shame, could show none.

And down came the reaper, and spared not a stalk
The pang of his severing knife :
And Lie-abed perished, a poor barren thing,
Like all who will trifle with life.

THE LANDING OF CAPTAIN COOK

Autumn in Spring's attire
Bent her soft eyes upon the sleeping Earth,
And wooed the flowers into second birth
From out the ashes of the Summer's fire.

The singing zephyrs swept
Through ferny gorge and wider, sloping vale,
And 'neath the dying Moon and dawning pale,
The forest swayed and murmured, dreamed and slept.

But morning cried "Awake!"
And purple skies were fringed with rosy light,
And hill to mountain spoke in radiance bright,
And poured their glories on each down and brake.

And many a bird began
To twit and chatter of the coming day,
And many a blossom whispered as it lay
Luxurious where the leaping streamlet ran.

Upon the curving shore
The tranquil waters lapped the yielding sand,
Then, rolling backward from the dreaming land,
Merged their small voices in the ocean's roar.

But lo! there shines a sail
Across the amber bosom of the sea,
And hill and forest, flower, stream and tree
Arise and shout, "To thee all hail! All hail!"

And, gliding o'er the bay,
The herald of a thousand vessels more
Steals to its moorings by the Austral shore,
A battered wanderer by an unknown way.

'Twas but a little ship ;
Yet what great destiny its coming told !
The advent of a race, ardent and bold,
To ride adversity with scornful lip !

For soon the day would come,
When men and women from the British Isles
Would risk old fortune's frowns, and court her
 smiles
In many a verdant nook of this new home.

And many a fevered brain
And many eager hands would toil and toil,
To force the unwilling gold from out the soil,
Where for unnumbered ages it had lain.

The hives of busy men
Would build the cities and the lesser towns,
And flocks and herds people the watered downs,
The axeman's blows resound in many a glen.

Great Cook, with flag on high
Claimed for his England all that promised here,
And saw the future with a vision clear,
Sowing and reaping 'neath this opal sky.

Thou first of all the band
To whom this infant nation owes its praise !
Didst thou behold the still more distant days,
When other men shall build where we have planned ?

And will the cry arise,
" For me, for me this land and all its good ? "
Or will the watchword ring out " Brotherhood ? "
Will peace, the smiling, be our children's prize ?

There was no ear to heed :
The hills and forests that beheld thee stand
As conquering hero on this virgin strand
Keep well the hallowed secret thou didst read.

What will our future hold ?
Our God, Thou knowest, and must guide us yet ;
For every youthful nation is beset
With error, failure, or with risks untold.

So, Brothers, dare and do !
With faith undying in your future strength,
Press onward, till your hand is laid at length
Upon the heritage that waiteth you.

If strange the way, and dark,
Look backward to that Autumn morn with pride
Of him, who reef and shoal and waves defied,
The dauntless master of that venturous bark.

No tempest quelled his soul ;
No fear of seas uncharted thrust him back ;
But ever onward o'er the unknown track,
The courted breezes drew him to his goal.

Dear Land, if worthy thou
Of such ungrudging toil and perils past,
Be it our joyous duty, first and last,
To strive and serve with like devotion now.

ALWAYS VICTOR

Love said to Youth, and smote him where he stood,
"Ask not for pity, for my heart is stone !
"E'en though, beseeching, thou shouldst pour
thy blood,
"Thou shalt be granted none."

Love said to Manhood, as he grasped his spear,
"Take now thy weapons ! Prove thy right to
sway !"
Straight, then, they fought, but Love was victor
still,
Though sorely fought the fray.

Love said to Age, and sweet his tones and low,
"I shall uphold thee till thy journey's end !"
Age smiled and blessed him, and with perfect
trust
Did lean on Love, his friend.

THE SPIRIT OF NIGHT

Moonlight flooding the rolling plain,
Shadows fearsome beneath the trees !
Steals a faintly whispered refrain,
Like the hush of slumbrous seas,
Whence this voice, O my Soul ?
Is it the breathing of nature asleep ?
Thyself in restful silence keep,
O my Soul, my Soul !

Up through the darkness moves a sound,
Soft as the fall of dew-clad feet,
All-enfolding and all-profound,
As a sacred presence sweet.
This deep calm, O my Soul !
Is it the kiss of the angel Death,
Or God's immortalising breath ?
Listen, my Soul, my Soul.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—THE FERN

The little fern that loves the shade
Where tinkling waters lull to sleep,
No gaudy blossom holds displayed
The world's slight flatteries to keep.
Her loving task is but to stand
Behind Earth's blossom beauties rare,
That in her arms this radiant band
May blow and beam more fair.

MAY

'Tis May : and o'er the green Earth, up and down,
The sturdy ploughman guides the rending blade ;
He loves the earthy smell of furrows brown,
Their long, straight lines upon the hillside laid :
In faith he drops, the seed upon the mould,
And turns to other tasks which life may bring,
To wait the harvest, e'en a hundredfold,
From each one tiny, planted living thing.

FROM OUT THE DEEP ABYSS

From out the deep abyss, where flows the stream
Of human pain and woe,
There rose a cry for help and I did deem
I could not say it no ;
“ But wait,” I said, “ till I have made an end
“ Of this one task ; then I will be thy friend ! ”

So I delayed, and when my task was o’er,
I hastened to relieve
The heart that mourned in tribulation sore.
But late, too late, to give
My little gift of kindness ; and I wept
For shame that I in doing well had slept.

Listen !—If thou wouldst bring thy fellows aid,
When God above has need,
Let the call be as eagerly obeyed
As grants thy hottest speed.
Be thy ambition in the path of right
To emulate the swiftness of the light.

BROTHERHOOD

True brotherhood can never lie
In pity's mild and tender eye ;
For pity stoops from heights above,
And condescends a mede of love
To pour upon the hearts below,
That waste and suffer in their woe.

There is no brotherhood in him
Who only scans the orbit dim
Of lower planes in human life,
And holds himself above the strife
That moulds all human destiny
And powers for posterity.

It is no brother's part to stand
With eye serene and nerveless hand,
While men of courage sweat and fight
In the defence of what is right :
Nay, if you cannot say God Speed,
You must against them take the lead.

They are our brother men who know
Through self-same pang a brother's woe ;
Who read as clear as on a scroll,
In every man a heaven-born soul,
Whose dignity is that alone
Which cannot brook a tyrant tone.

WHEN FAIR AND TRANQUIL SMILE THE FIELDS

“ AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS ”

When fair and tranquil smile the fields of life,
And not a fear disturbs the soul serene,
Then through the calm a living Presence steals,
Reviving, all-sustaining, yet unseen :
O Jesu, Saviour, still thy promise stands,
And as we move along our even way,
With love enfolding sweeten every hour,
And with thy mercies brighten every day.

And when we reach the mountain steeps of strife,
With passes tempest-swept, which must be crossed,
Still 'mid our wretchedness we onward press,
Nor fear the lonely terrors of the lost :
For Thou art near, and still Thy promise sure,
Dear Saviour, guiding o'er the roughest way !
Thy love to sweeten every bitter hour,
Thy strength to hold through every stormy day.

But soon the narrow bourne of death shall lie
A step forgotten 'mid the bliss unending,
And glory, every mortal phase transcending,
Shall give a song for every tear and sigh :
And through the rapture and the radiance still,
Thou mighty One, Thou fairest of the fair,
Art in us, and around us, everywhere !—
Yea, Heaven is home, because our Lord is there.

BLINDNESS IS NEVER SWEET

Blindness is never sweet :

It shuts day's windows, and outspreads a pall
Of dim indefiniteness over all
Material things ; like horrid nightmare chains
It binds the feet, the eager hand restrains.
Vast distances diminish to a sphere
Whose dull walls lower perpetually near :
The only shafts that pierce the ambient grey
Are sounds, with their slow-beating vibrant ray,
Rolling, but never flashing, to the heart
Of him whose soul in blindness sits apart.

Closed other doors than sight ;
The road to learning is a mountain trail,
Each upward step a fear lest it should fail ;
Love's shining portals rarely open wide,
And wedlock's great adventure oft denied :
Too limited the chance for service found,
Each flaming aspiration quenched and drowned ;
And e'en the needs of life one dare not miss,
In shadowed lanes hedged in by prejudice
Must aye be sought, through wearing, grinding
 stress,
With little hope for what men call success.

I hear the preacher's voice,
In songs of resignation and of tears,
Come tenderly and sweetly down the years !
He bids the man with blasted vision find
More subtle radiance in the realm of mind,
In contact with the great divine Unseen,
When grosser joys no longer intervene.
Let the old grasp this comfort, since their hour
To strive and battle with full human power
Is past ! 'Tis theirs alone to " Stand and Wait " ;
But mine—to live, to fight, to conquer fate.

O Brothers in the dark !
I have another song for you ! Arise !
Above are the illimitable skies,
And out beyond are boundless widths of space,
Where you can run and win your mortal race !
'Tis shame to dream and loiter in the Sun
Of ease and progress by another won,
To take of everything, and nothing give !
Beat down the bars, and cry, " O let me live
" As others ; let me toil and take my fill
" Of all life's best !— " Brothers, you can—and
will !

MY BOOMERANGS

I've a handy lot of boomerangs,
But not the wooden kind ;
All are bent, and smooth, and ready,
In a corner of my mind.

I have cheery words to brighten,
And the word of sympathy ;
And a thought of sweet forgiveness
For each little injury.

There are plans to visit sick ones,
Or to help a friend in need,
Hope to offer to the hopeless,
Fields of love to plant with seed.

But I find that in the bundle
Hidden mostly out of sight,
There are boomerangs less lovely,
Apt to rush upon their flight.

Words of anger, hate and malice,
Acts of lying, theft and greed,
Thoughts of evil and uncleanness,
May be flung at fearful speed.

Let me hesitate and ponder,
Ere a single shaft I fling,
For the thing sent hurling outward
Will return, the self-same thing.

Break the boomerangs of evil,
Yea, the splinters break and burn !
Who would like to have his black thoughts,
His bad boomerangs, return ?

FLOWER-THOUGHT—
THE CREEPING SCARLET PEA

O Lowly Plant, whose blossoms stain the sod,
With crimson spots, like those of mortal pain !
Beholding thee, I see the Son of God
By human pride and folly cruelly slain.
Thy posture prone and meek, thy signs of sorrow
In love and adoration I would borrow.

JUNE

*In June I hear a thousand airy sounds,
That tinkle softly from the land of dreams ;
They ring for wedding feasts and joyous rounds
Of fairy dancing by the bush-land streams :
And forth I go to seek the festive throng ;
And Lo ! a field of rosy heath I find,
Whose blossom-laden stems the whole day long
Are gentle swaying, ringing, in the wind.*

THE LORD OF LIGHT

There was glory in the sunset that was flooding
o'er the west ;
Like a ruddy golden breastplate on the Heaven's
lucid breast ;
And the sea was all a glory, like the Heavens, red
and gold,
While the creeping evening shadows did the distant
hills enfold.

On the cliffs the thronging people paused to wonder
and to gaze,
And each heart went up to Heaven in a silent
psalm of praise ;
For what man beholds the Sunset in its flaming
glory dight,
Will not lift his soul up higher to the source of
all our light ?

O 'tis sweet and holy rapture when the Lord of
Light comes by,
And His love in roseate splendour overwhelms the
inward eye ;
And His golden mercies touching with their
radiance sorrow's sea :
O Thou Lord of Light, I'm singing silent psalms
of praise to Thee !

“AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT”

When youth with blended Sun and showers
O'erspreads the landscape of our days,
When hope bestrews with fragrant flowers
The verdant margin of our ways ;
Ah, then, all doors are open wide,
And every path is free to tread,
And passion sweeps, with rolling tide
Toward the unknown shore ahead.

Then who would dare to speak the word
That we had thrown away our chance,
That while a strong ambition stirred,
And bade us eagerly advance,
Our soul's best good had meekly stood,
To offer bounties all in vain,
And we went gaily as we would,
Never to meet that good again ?

But time is building fast the court
Round which we run the race of years,
With radiant bowers for our sport,
Or frowning archways for our tears.
And in its walls are doors untold,
Which, one by one, are closed for aye,
And over each this legend cold,
“Thy feet no more shall pass this way !”

There may, perchance, a path or two
Lie open to the aged feet !
But know, Young Traveller, it is true
At last but one thine eyes shall greet !
This leadeth to the mystic port
Whose opening men call death ; and thou
Shalt leave this life's too narrow court
By that lone door thou darest now.

Yet, couldst thou look beyond, and know
What beauteous fields outspread appear,
Thou wouldst no thought of love bestow
On the closed doors that front thee here.

FOOTSTEPS

Often before the dawning steals
From down below the east,
Ere birds begin to celebrate
Their daily chanson feast,
I lie awake, and listen for
The quiet sounds of night ;
And comes a footstep passing by,
Quick, urgent, firm and light.
Why goes he hurrying through the night
While other humans sleep ?
What labour calls him from his bed ?
What vigil must he keep ?
And whether youth or man is he ?
His life a song or sigh ?
I may not know : I only hear
His footsteps passing by.

Thus goes the throng of human souls
That pass us every day ;
We hear the echo of their feet
Upon the beaten way :
We sometimes think we read their tales
As 'twere a story told ;
Their purposes seem open spread
And writ in letters bold.
We err—the swift wayfarer goes
Without a voice or cry !
His only sign to fellow souls
The footstep passing by.

THE SORCERESS

A CHINESE FABLE

Old Chao was a sorcerer
Of China's deepest lore ;
And mandarin and peasant both
Besought his wisdom's store ;
They brought him presents from the field,
And presents from the town ;
They hung upon his favouring word,
And shunned with dread his frown.

For he was leagued with all the powers
That minister to fate,
And on his will the good or ill
Obediently did wait ;
He knew the progress of the stars,
The secrets of the Earth,
And spirits that are kind and cruel
At marriage or at birth.

And Chao grew each day more rich
With gifts the people brought,
Still wider spread the fame abroad
Of wonders that he wrought ;
But Oh, he had a grievance sore,
A rival in his art,
More bitter still, it was a maid
That ministered the smart.

If Chao's frown should chance to fall
On some unhappy maid,
And she, upon her bridal morn
To evil were betrayed,

Then would the maiden sorceress
A cunning scheme design
To turn old Chao's plans to nought,
And cheat the powers malign.

Sometimes a hapless farmer failed
To send his gifts of grain,
And Chao then would curse the field,
And drive away the rain ;
Peachblossom, too, would work her spell,
And by her magic give
A secret stream or hidden well
Whence he might draw, and live.

Peachblossom's fame grew great apace,
And great the wizard's wrath,
That such a one should dare to stand
A hindrance in his path ;
And so he cast about to find,
With all his blighting skill,
A means by which the sorceress
Should perish at his will.

To his cruel purposes he brought
A youth of favour rare,
As suitor for Peachblossom's hand,
With marriage contract fair :
He furnished gifts of choicest kind,
To be the maiden's dower,
With promise of abounding wealth
And happiness and power.

But cunning Chao claimed the right
To choose the wedding day,
And, bidding the youth to name him sire,
He sent him on his way.

With gifts so costly in his hand,
And magic's fateful aid,
Soon was the net of marriage cast
About the hapless maid :
The plighting of the pair was held,
The contract ratified,
And named the morn when bridal chair
Should bear away the bride.

But by her powers the sorceress
Discovered their design,
And from the marriage made for her
Her heart did disincline ;
Yet, hers was but a woman's voice,
Resistance worse than vain ;
And many schemes were born to die
Within her clever brain.

She knew the day of Chao's choice
Was that unhappy morn,
When curses fall upon the maid
In bridal carriage borne ;
And as she left her father's house,
Would hover o'er her head
The spirit of the golden fowl
That brings disaster dread.

At length the maiden's brow was clear,
And gay was she once more,
With laughter's ripple on her lips,
As it was wont before :
For she had found a clever trick
The spirit bird to cheat,—
To match her wit 'gainst Chao's, and
To foil his planned deceit.

Then, on the wedding morning bright,
The youth, with many a friend,
Came gaily to Peachblossom's house,
Her journey thence to tend :
But ere they closed the wedding chair,
She bade them all to cast
A plenteous shower of snowy rice
As through the door she passed.

And merry, merry was the laugh
Within the ruddy chair !
The golden pheasant saw the food,
And, lighting from the air,
He danced about with rapid pecks,
To gather up the grain,
Nor paused to curse the passing bride,
Nor all her festive train.
Thus feasting at the threshold near,
His purpose he forgot,
Till bride and bridegroom, guests and friends
Had passed the fatal spot.

Thus did Peachblossom thwart her foe,
And lived a happy wife ;
Six children, everyone a son,
Did bless her wedded life :
So, every maid who hopes for joy
When she becomes a bride,
Must have the showers of snowy rice
To turn ill luck aside.

MUSIC ALL THE WAY

There is music for the gay days,
When the sky is smiling blue,
When the gum-trees whisper secrets
That the wattles know are true :
There are songs for merry children,
And for feet that dance and skip :
O the joyous music flowing
From the young and radiant lip !
So we'll sing for joy on gay days,
Or for sadness on the grey days ;
And a song shall brighten hours of work and play !
Whether young, or growing older,
Head erect, or stooping shoulder,
There is music, music, music all the way.

There is music for the grey days,
When the clouds are dark and low,
When the tune is sweet and mournful,
And the rhythm rich and slow ;
Hymns of victory and courage,
Strains of triumph loudly ring !
Yes, there's music for each moment,
If we only care to sing.
So we'll sing for joy on gay days,
Or for sadness on the grey days ;
And a song shall brighten hours of work and play :
Whether young, or growing older,
Head erect or stooping shoulder,
There is music, music, music all the way.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—THE HEATH

There's a ripple and a ringing,
Of a thousand thousand bells ;
Hear the silver music swinging,
See the frosty Moonbeams winging,
While the barren hills are singing
To a thousand thousand bells !
In sky above and Earth beneath,
List to the music of the heath.

JULY

*Winter has stormed July, and cold the days,
And still more bitter is the night's chill grip ;
We sit in peace before the ruddy blaze,
Content to hear the rain's insistent drip :
Now murmuring softly, like a sweet-voiced guest,
Then like a fusilade on roof and wall !
But safe at home within this glowing nest,
We care not if the founts of Heaven fall.*

THE RAIN'S SOFT CURTAIN FALLS

The rain's soft curtain falls
Around our dwelling-place,
Bead chains before the door,
At windows misty lace :
Its murmurous music on the roof
Sings low a song of rest ;
And not a discord from the World
Finds voice within this nest.

Before the glowing fire
I sit, Dear Love, with thee,
Shut in with peace and joy
And dreams of things to be :
And still the kissing raindrops fall,
And round our dwelling sigh !
Just now, Dear Love, in all the World
Are only you and I.

THE RHYME OF THE SUN-SEEKER

A BOHEMIAN LEGEND

Weary and sad, the orphan sank
Beneath the shelter of a wall,
Where, on his shivering form, the rays
Of the bright noontide Sun might fall.

For days and nights his wandering feet
Had sought for food and warmth in vain,
While on his shrinking limbs there smote
The piercing wind and lashing rain.

But now the glorious beaming Sun,
The beauteous King of Morning, smiled,
And comforted, beside the wall
He slept, in peace, the orphan child.

Throughout the glowing hour of noon,
The bird-chants of approaching eve,
The fragrant Sunset's balmy dew,
Sleep's healing gifts he did receive.

Then he awoke, and Lo ! The day
Had stolen out into the west,
Bearing its boon of warmth and light
Beyond the mountain's purple crest.

The wanderer wept, and trembled sore,
And cried, " O kind and blessed Light,
" That I might follow thee, and live !
" I fear to perish in the night ! "

With tears he sought the mountain's foot,
And upward bent his lagging way,
For over yonder lowering steep
He thought to find the vanished day.

More rugged grew the path, more fierce
At every step the effort made ;
Nor precipice, nor torrent's roar,
Nor jagged rock his climbing stayed !

How bitter was the lonely hour,
As through the midnight, starless, dim,
He strove to save his hope alive,
Till he could reach the mountain's rim.

The summit still loomed far above,
When strength and courage failed and died :
His weary limbs could bear no more—
He slept upon the mountain side.

The shepherd in the early dawn,
Came seeking for a straying sheep,
And found the orphan where he lay
Prone and unconscious, on the steep.

He raised him tenderly, and drew
His shepherd's cloak about the boy,
And homeward bore him down the slope,
His father-heart aglow with joy.

His wife made ready food, and laid
The drooping child before the fire,
And tended with a pitying care
The wounds of rending rock and brier.

And when day came, the orphan lad
Looked up, and knew his goal was won,
For radiant mother-love was there,
Sweet, warm and tender as the Sun.

THE UNATTAINABLE

Thou art a cluster of radiant flowers,
Smiling upon me from branches on high ;
Thou art the music oft heard in the bowers,
Sweet and elusive, when night breezes sigh.

Thou art the mountain I covet to climb,
Ever forbidding my stumbling feet ;
Thou art the rhythm of faint distant chime,
Reaching my strained ears with uncertain beat.

Thou art the pleasant path over the stream,
Where I could linger in safety and bliss,
But the wide river's unpitying gleam
Stays thee on that bank, while I long on this.

Thou art the Heaven, whose soft curtain falls
At the horizon in shimmering blue ;
Yet, when I fain would approach those bright walls,
Ever receding, they shine in my view.

Yea, my beloved, thou art all that I crave,
Morning and evening, in Summer and rain :
Must I go, longing still, down to the grave,
Spending my soul in a love that is vain ?

EVERYBODY'S STORY

Say you that the tale is old,
Only love and lovers ?
Smile you at the joy untold
That my heart discovers
In the love that aye was given,
Youth's best gift from God in Heaven ?

Did you in your youthful days
Never kiss a maiden,
Never loiter in the ways
With her presence laden ?
Were you always quite discreet,
When you, two at eve did meet ?

Mother, do you quite forget
How the pulse did quicken,
When outside the church you met,
Greeting each in phrases set ?
Or how you did sicken
When he smiled, or seemed to smile,
On some other maid awhile ?

Did you ever think that you
Played the same old story ?
Yet your bliss had nothing new
In its dazzling glory !
Millions since young Adam wooed
Have a chosen maid pursued.

You were always glad to tell
How you loved each other ;
Friends and neighbours knew it well ;
For you could not smother
Bubbling confidence that flowed
To each traveller by the road.

That is why I venture now
With my little story :
And, as you were young, allow
Me to flaunt my glory !
Smile, but kindly, if you will,
So I keep my glory still.

SERMON CRITICS

The preacher was solemnly warning his flock,
And grave were his looks and his words ;
And from the church spire there came the clear
 notes,
The eventide chant of the birds.

“ My Brothers, I counsel you, turn from your sins !
“ For sinners are ye, everyone ! ”
“ Indeed,” quoth the Myna, with impudent chirp,
“ And what have these good people done ? ”

“ You stand at the seat of your Maker condemned,
“ And he hath declared you his foes ! ”
“ I never ! ” the Starling responded, “ Just hear
“ How little our Father he knows ! ”

“ Then, turn from the evil ! For why should you
 cling
“ To Earth with its tears and its sighs ? ”
“ No, no ! ” came a chorus, “ The Earth has its
 blossoms
“ To match with its radiant skies ! ”

“ O trust not in riches : they vanish as mist ! ”
“ Quite true,” spoke the Myna once more :
“ But trust in the Father, whose being is love
“ To lend you his bountiful store ! ”

“ The pleasures of life, the pride of the flesh,
“ Oh, cast these behind you I pray ! ”
“ Don’t heed him, for good things are sent by our
 God,
“ Who wills that his children be gay ! ”

But darkness was stealing out over the sky,
And go-to-bed chatter must cease :
And while the great preacher went solemnly on,
The critics were sleeping in peace.

A troop of brown sparrows who perched in a nook,
The last of the converse had claimed :

“ How queer, little Brothers, this fellow’s discourse,
“ When he who THE MASTER is named,

“ Oft told them that God is the father of all,

“ And loves e’en the humble as we !

“ Ah well, little Brothers, here comes the night
star

“ With slumber for you and for me ! ”

Oh, earnest the preacher, and burning his words !
But something within me confessed,
That, e’en though a sinner, and under the doom,
I like the bird preachers the best.

FLOWER-THOUGHT— THE SPIDER ORCHID

I'm frightened of creepy things ! Come away
quick !

Oh no ! It's a flower : how foolish of me !
I thought it a spider brown perched on a stick,
Just waiting to pounce on the first he could see :
I'll touch it ! And then—you may laugh when I
say

I'll be creepy all over the rest of the day.

AUGUST

*Through Wintry nights, when stars were diamond
clear,
And days when mists along the valleys ran,
The trees kept silent watch from year to year,
Rich treasure guarding for the use of man :
And he who wantonly destroys a tree
Has killed a friend of all the human race,
A thing of beauty and of majesty,
A type of strength, a symphony of grace.*

THE IMPRESS OF SOLITUDE

Like crystal goblet turned upon its rim,
The cloudless sky upon the Earth did rest,
And 'neath the o'erturned bowl my memory dim
Discerns a child upon the pasture's breast,
Culling the flowers with which the grass was
dressed.

The silence of the plain was all around,
The zephyr'd silence of the dreamy day,
When fluttering moth wings pass with whirring
sound,
And nodding blooms sleep 'neath the steady ray
Of loving Sunlight, rich in gold as they.

Such deep, calm solitude is ever fraught
With visions and with fancies for the soul ;
'Mid such the Baptist and the Christ were taught
The precepts of their noble self-control,
And love that can our human griefs console.

The child, her lap o'erflowing with a store
Of flowery fragrance gathered from the field,
Sat on the grass to turn the treasure o'er,
And find such wonder as the flower yield
Has ever to the childish heart revealed.

But slowly, 'mid the silence of the hour,
She listless grew, and laid the flowers aside,
The solitude had set its stilling power
Upon her eyes ; and then the bonnet wide
Sank with its nestling head in grassy tide.

Then surely, from the glowing span on high
Her ear attending caught an echo faint
Of Heaven's music, like a distant sigh
Of chorussed voices joined in rapturous plaint,
Like fervent adoration by a saint.

Was it the angels' song? She listened well,
Scarce breathing, lest her ear should miss the sound
When to a mighty triumph it should swell,
With songs of earth in God's own music drowned !
But still the sky, and mute the fields around.

Oh, Child, my older years may call the strain
A trick of mind, a fantasy unreal ;
Yet, doubts arise and front me, and I fain
Would tune my soul to hear that Heavenly peal,
If it should down the ways of silence steal !

For holy hours like these their impress leave,
E'en if but dreams ; and many a lofty deed
From such a humble birth its head did heave :
Then, shall I mock at moments that can breed
Aught which to higher, nobler planes may lead ?

THE ALMOND BLOOM

I passed beneath the almond trees,
And heard a busy humming,
Where myriad blossoms told the bees
The Darling Spring is coming.

And though the winds of August chill
Across the land are blowing,
Or starlit nights are keen and still,
Or frosty morns are glowing ;

Yet, I have heard the gathering bees
Among the blossoms humming,
With fragrant odours on the breeze
To say the Spring is coming.

TO MOUNT MACEDON

When thou art calm, O Mount, and Sunshine
pours

In radiant torrent down thy wooded side,
And when thy fleecy pall of mist
Shadows and whisperings mysterious glide ;
Then I am still with thy serenity,
And glad or pensive in thy majesty !

When, as through ancient chapel, steals the sound
Of singing winds about thy myrtle shrines,
Or deep, low sighings, as from weary heart,
Shudder and moan among thy crowing pines ;
Ah, wailing Mountain, thou art likened then
To sin-confessing, sin-repenting men !

But when the tempest, howling through thy pines,
Or lashing gums, or rattling bracken ferns,
Makes thee to roar in ocean's thunder tones,
Then swift my thought on Armageddon turns,
And cries, " High Heaven is out against Earth's
wrong,
" And thou art shouting Heaven's battle-song ! "

FOUR LITTLE SONGS OF LIFE

I—THE GOLDEN DAY

Golden blossoms laugh with pleasure !
Morn is gay :
Beats the lover's heart in measure
With the day.
Toils he with a gladsome heart
In the field or in the mart ;
All he has with love to share
Makes him happy everywhere.

So the morning cometh fair,
Flower-wreathed,
When the wedding vows at last
Shall be breathed ;
Life shall be one long delight,
Laughter, song, from morn till night !
Buds of hope and love's full flowers—
Blessed, blessed all the hours.

2—THE LILY DAY

Where fragrant blossoms breathe their sweet caresses
From snowy cups, upon the quiet air,
A lily face amid its silken tresses
Lies still, for silent death has kissed the fair.
Oh, mother-tears upon the pillow falling,
Vain as the dew to save the morning flower !
Oh, father-heart, in voiceless anguish calling,
A thief has rifled thy love-guarded tower !
Yet, Hearts bereavèd, this, your first of sorrows
Shall bind you closer, with more lovely ties,
And thus united, through the bright to-morrows
Rejoice, for roses bloom when lilies die !

3—THE CHILDREN'S DAY

There is merry, merry laughter
In the eyes that sparkle brightly ;
There is sound of festive music,
And of feet that trip it lightly :
And the maid is learning fast,
That her girlhood days are past,
And that love has come at last
With its strange, undreamed-of joys.

While the youth with ardent glances
Many rosy blushes waking,
Leads the gay and graceful measure,
Till the dawn is almost breaking :
To the parents memories sweet,
Echoing to the tripping feet,
Their own tale of love repeat
In their children's loves and joys.

Oh, the merry, merry hours,
When old love doth hold the rein,
When our little ones in love
Make us lovers once again.

4—AUTUMN DAY

Through life's sweet Spring of joy we came,
Our hearts in union beating ;
Through life's rich Summer, heeding not
How fast the days were fleeting :
And as in Autumn-tide the fruit
Doth find its full perfection,
Now, soul to soul, we know the bliss
Of perfected affection.

Spring had its clouds, and Summer, too,
Its days of shade and sorrow ;
But love was ever near to point
To Sunshine on the morrow :
And now that Winter's darker days
Are drawing ever nearer,
Our hearts each to the other cry,
" Love, thou wert never dearer ! "

THE PETULANT SEA

WRITTEN AT PORTARLINGTON

The sea it grew angry, and charged the shore,
The waves smote the beach with a savage roar ;
They hustled the light shells that sleeping lay
On their couches of sand at the edge of the bay.

It chased the small children right up the beach,
And hissed at the brown toes it could not reach ;
It swept o'er the dark rocks unwilling to shift,
And struggled to tear a small boat adrift.

It foamed at the piles of the sturdy pier,
And ripped up the seaweed that floated near ;
Such raging and hissing, such fury and spite
Did stir up the water once tranquil and bright.

Five minutes it raged, then the tempest was dead ;
The sea sank again on its shell sprinkled bed ;
The boat was at rest, and the children ran down
To paddle and splash with their naked feet brown.

And what was it, Children, that caused this display ?
Why this !—A great steamer had entered the bay,
And straightway the waters began to protest
Because such a burden was laid on its breast.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—BILLYBUTTON

Billybutton yellow,
Fat and round and fluffy,
Like a jolly mayor of old,
Coat with pollen snuffy !
“ Ho, Ho, Ho,” he laughs and chuckles,
Till his petals snap,
And a butterfly in passing
Lights upon his lap.

SEPTEMBER

*Spring bursts resplendent; and at her command
The showers of gold have fallen everywhere,
And birds are chanting loud on every hand,
Because the wattle once again is fair :
And by the creeks, and in the forest edges,
As if the Sun his gold did overturn,
Her yellow altar fires upon the ledges
Their fragrant incense of the Spring-time burn.*

HONOURS DUE

I sing a song of praise
To souls obscure, whose vision spanned the sea
To far Australia, nation yet to be,
Who, following the vision, hither came
To toil and strive, to delve and plant, and frame
A life rejuvenated by their pain :
For all our fathers lost, and all we gain
I sing a song of praise.

I sing a song of praise
To those dear women who, with hearts bereft,
Old ties and kindred, home and country left,
Fit helpmates for the men they loved and served.
In hardships grim their courage never swerved ;
In pangs of birth, in death and want and fears ;
Yea, to our mothers' sufferings and tears
I sing a song of praise.

I sing a song of praise
To Britain, whence these men and women came,
With great resolves and living hopes aflame.
Thou guardian spirit of a people new,
From whom the breath of dawning life we drew !
From 'neath the starry cross that burns above,
To thee this offering of filial love,
I sing, a song of praise.

FAILURE

Through years of ardent effort made,
With mind convinced, and powers arrayed
Against the things that progress stayed
In human life and thought,
With hope a passion burning bright,
And knowledge that my cause was right,
Well-armed and sure I fought.

I knew some skill was mine to guide
The weaker brother at my side,
Some gift in me, to him denied,
To help him on his way ;
And oh, what joy 'twere mine to give,
And his to take, and use, and live !
So toiled I night and day.

Such native graces as adorn,
And those from learning's store-house borne,
I hung upon the altar horn
Of my resplendent aim ;
I grudged nor time nor weariness,
I yearned, I burned, and nothing less,
With love's consuming flame.

So swept the years along, and I
Grew sick with effort, and a cry
Burst from my heart ; and dim my eyes,
For lo ! the days had sped,
Leaving me empty hands and weak,
And fields all harvestless and bleak,
And hope a passion dead.

How bitter are those secret hours,
When failure, like a storm-cloud, lowers
To drench and batter all the flowers
Of earnest service given !
When vanished expectation's brood,
And shattered by ingratitude
The things for which we've striven.

Thus walked I in the shadow, till
A wondrous glory shot its thrill
Into my bosom, erst so chill,
'Neath disappointment's blight ;
For, surely as I breathe and move,
And as the Heaven shines above,
As follows day the night,

Each honest act of mercy done,
Each course of loving duty run,
Each aspiration launched or won,
Though fruitless seems the cost,
All noble things we do and dare,
Must fruitful be, sometime, somewhere,
And never can be lost.

THE SUMMIT

I stood at the foot of life's hill,
Whose summit was beckoning me !
So, up, past youth's joy-singing rill,
Through forest cool, secret and still,
I climbed till I reached where men gaze
O'er the World, to eternity's sea.

Far off was the joy-singing rill,
From heights so exalted and lone :
The road I had travelled did seem
The passionate path of a dream ;
Life's dear aspirations unveiled,
Love's mystical secret full-blown.

Though wistful I stand on the heights,
I would not return to the throng !
Triumphant o'er vanished delights,
I rise through the failures and fights,
Where rolls the great music of God
In the winning soul's victory song.

JOYOUS RAIN

We sigh when the rain is falling,
And think of the children's tears ;
But when the gold rain of the wattle
On hillside and gully appears,
Ah, then is all sorrow forgotten,
And chants of delight are the strain,
When the golden drip ! drip ! of the wattle
Is the Sun-sprayed, the bush-scented rain.

THE WEDDING GARMENT

Revelations xix, 8

In my weak hands the Lord has placed a thread,
Which I must spin into the fabric wide,
The clean, white garment, which the angel said
The saints are weaving for the Heavenly bride.

But many fears lurk in my trembling soul,
Since slender is the thread, and poor my skill,
Lest my imperfect part should mar the whole—
Yet, God has spoken—I must do his will.

Often my awkward fingers miss the strands ;
How oft I know not ; ever more and more
The half-done work recalls my weary hands,
And bids them every misplaced thread restore.

But skill at weaving grows at every hour,
As slowly o'er the warp my work I trace,
And I aspire to weave some snowy flower
To gleam more brightly on the linen's face.

Through years of toil I see a meagre span,
So small my portion in the bridal dress !
Indeed, I know not where my task began,
So like to other men's my righteousness !

And, Soul of mine, the linen must be white !
The wedding garment not a stain must show !
When standeth she within her Bridegroom's sight,
The Holy Maid no cloud of shame must know.

Thyself hold fast from all that maketh vile,
For vain the spinning, if thy hands are found
The fabric's perfect whiteness to defile,
Or heedless, foul it with the World around.

Great Craftsman, teach my hands the skill they
 need,
That I may one day in my task rejoice ;
That life's fulfilment and reward indeed
May be the sound of Thy appraising voice.

SILENCE

From the dim chamber steals the chilly air,
For death sits throned upon a loved one there :
I enter ; and beside the white-spread couch,
My anguished reverence for the dead I vouch.

Still flowers that lie upon the snowy sheet,
Still, folded hands, and still, composèd feet,
Smooth marble brow, and eyes that quiver not,
Still lips, their warmth of language all forgot.

Still walls that dare not even whisper “ Death ! ”
And I, a living mortal, bate my breath,
Lest I this awesome silence desecrate.
Thus do I stand amid the hush, and wait,

For what ? Oh, my Belovèd, for the word
That one short day ago so faintly stirred
Those frozen lips of thine ; or for the smile
That oft did joy to sorrow reconcile !

But not a breath disturbs the coverlet ;
No love beams on those features calm and set ;
Only the sightless, soundless majesty,
That cries, “ Away ! Thou hast no part in me ! ”

O that a breath might stir a sleeping bloom,
Or step re-echo in the silent room !
O that a word from these dead lips might start
To quell the lonely torment in my heart !

But silence, always silence, numbing, chill,
Broods o’er the snowy bed and figure still !
Nor dare I utter cry of mortal pain !—
Away, away ! leave death alone to reign !

Leave him, O Heart, in silence there supreme,
And seek thy living fellows, where the gleam
Of hope eternal shineth strong and clear,
And knowledge that life's ending is not here.

MARÉ, THE BLUE

Right into the city of silence I went,
That stands on the borders of Maré the blue,
Where tenantless houses ornate
Each stood with a wide-open gate,
Or hid in the seaweed their windowless state,
All built in the country of Maré the blue.

And some of the houses were turreted high,
While others more widely their gleaming roofs
threw ;
And on their bright walls were displayed
The hues in the rainbow portrayed,
And whitest or rosiest marble inlaid
These beautiful houses from Maré the blue.

Thou city of silence, whose tenants are gone,
Fair myriad builders, whose dwellings I view !
You shelter from raiders no more,
Your need of a fortress is o'er ;
And so for my own I may gather a store
Of unpeopled houses from Maré the blue.

FLOWER-THOUGHT— THE EVERLASTINGS

The Earth is clad in robes of green,
With golden spangles strewn about it ;
Just step beyond the farm-house door,
And look ! And sure, you will not doubt it :
My Lady Nature holds a feast,
Her robe—how gladly she did don it !
Spring grass the fabric that she wears,
With golden everlastings on it.

OCTOBER

*The days are full of chirping and delight,
And feathered parents have their mede of care,
For little wings are taking their first flight
From leafy perch ; and out upon the air
Are borne afield, and far from sheltering nest,
To soar and flutter 'mid the Sun and rain,
To follow life's inexorable quest,
For love and offspring—then to sleep again.*

MYSELF

Through many days and years I did aspire
To be the centre of the circling spheres ;
I craved the noble gift of song to fire
The listening World to joy or tender tears :
I would be like the gorgeous flower, seen
Of all, most lovely, and the garden's queen.

But not for me to reach this high estate !
A speck of star dust in the Milky Way,
A chorister in life's chorale great,
A floweret in a snowy sprig of may—
Such insignificance is mine to grace,
And 'mid the millions fill my humble place.

Yet, as the waning Summers pass me by,
And human leaves of Autumn round me fall,
I ever grow more sure that I am I,
Safely enshrined within this living wall ;
Like plant with branches to the daylight thrown,
But rooted deep, in secret, and alone.

That hidden, burning spark, that self of me,
The moulder of my outward being, shall glow,
As age-old starbeams that our eyes still see,
Though kindled first a thousand years ago :
Unquenchable, Myself, a ray divine,
With humble radiance shall ever shine.

THE BUILDERS

Where the warm verdant isle bursts through
The gleaming breast of ocean blue,
And where the shore with pearly sand
Murmurs the song of the lagoon
To painted shells by ripples strewn
Upon this tropic strand,

'Tis there the groves of palm-trees nod,
Dreaming, and clinging to the sod,
With pensive gaze upon the sea,
Thinking its azure light the sky,
Its foam the cloudlets passing by,
Its distance mystery.

And broad against the ocean's shock,
There stands the barrier coral rock.
Behold it rising, pile on pile,
'Twixt the lagoon and outer swell,
Each raging onset to repel,
The rampart of the isle.

In hours of calm the lazy wave
Its seaward-fronting wall may lave :
Or through some fretted gateway run
In tiny currents, captured soon
In the calm heart of the lagoon,
To wait the wooing Sun.

Or, break the tempests, howling wild,
About the rampart coral piled,
The billows charge the jagged reef,
And, tearing seaweed hair away,
Leave it in tangles on the bay,
Sign of their passion brief.

Still firm the barrier's planted feet,
Through whispering calm or breakers' beat !
Its little builders never cease
To ply their craft, but year by year
New lands for future ages rear,
These artisans of peace.

TO A SEASHELL

Fair palace built by one small toiler's pains !
That one frail creature there might find a home !
Within my hand I hold your painted dome,
Ringed round with russet, and with roseate veins.

This little inch-high turret hath a stair
Of rainbow-tinted marble, spirall'd round,
Where, softly hushed by ocean's lulling sound,
The lonely dweller rests in safety there.

It is a beauteous thing, this mansion small !
Its colours mete the finest eye to bless,
Its tapered tower moulded loveliness,
Straight from the heart of him who made us all.

And this fast bolted gate of ivory !
'Twere cunning smith who could unlock that door,
Unless the watchful tenant lived no more,
Nor rocked in tranquil safety on the sea.

And all this wonder of creative skill
Lies many times repeated at my feet,
Each little shell in form and hue complete,
Destined its humble purpose to fulfil.

I ponder, and I question in my mind :
Why should the Great Omniscient make thee so,
Since in the sum of life thy rank is low,
In thine own way no rarer thing designed ?

Frail little Creature, in thy Maker's eyes
Thy beauty burns, an oft rekindled light,
And never art thou mean in his fond sight :
Therefore I leave thee 'neath thine aqueous skies,
And take thy rifled kindred as my prize.

THE OCEAN'S SWEETER SONG

AT FLINDERS, VICTORIA

Evening ! And rose of Sunset in the west,
And in the east an upward climbing star ;
And here the sea, singing low melodies
It learned, I know not when, in depths afar.

Oh, solemn song, that with the deepening night
Deepens, and grows more noble in its strain,
As through life's closing hour grows clearer still,
Eternity's majestic refrain !

Then western roses pale to opal grey,
The dim star brightens, and the ocean's song
Full, rich, reverberant, swell upon the shore
In chord indefinite and cadence long.

And when night drops its dusky purple pall
O'er bay and headland, ocean cliff and shore,
I hear amid the mighty anthem sounds
More beauteous than the beating breakers' roar.

Sweet, tender tones, that speak of father-love,
And hushings low, like mother's lullaby,
The rapturous whisper of the lover's breath,
When souls are blending in one blissful sigh.

All that is holy, beautiful and good
Comes on this sweeter song from out the deep,
And rich in peace, I soon shall lay me down,
Nor heed the tumult near me while I sleep.

Thus would I have it, with the mighty sea
Of all the future ages at my feet :
That, 'mid the terrors of the night, my soul
Should hear the songs of Heaven, enchanting,
sweet :

For I shall trust, and reach my hands to God,
And in His bosom safe, unfearing rest,
E'en though eternity's first breaker, Death,
Must launch against my soul its raging crest !

A CHANGELING

Once young love was never daunted ;
He was then a warrior bold ;
No shy maiden heart its fortress
Could against its prowess hold,
Be her glances ne'er so cold.

Love is now a timid songster,
Hovering shyly overhead ;
Maiden, heed, lest thou affright him,
When his dainty wings are spread ;
Wave thy hand, and he is fled.

Maiden, do not strive to seize him,
If he wills not to alight !
Rather wait till time may change him
Once again to armoured knight,
Subtle, daring, royal in might !

FLOWER-THOUGHT—THE TEA-TREE

Sweep in, sweep out,
You crested wavelets from the bay !
While I upon the breasting land
With bended shoulders pray !
My limbs with anguished prayer distraught
For struggling sailors far away !
Sweep in, sweep out !
While I will strive, and bow, and pray !—
And from the tea-tree censers flowing,
Sweet incense comes, on me bestowing
Heaven's peace and comfort, as I pray !

NOVEMBER

*The days steal by, and milder breezes pass,
Across the ranges from the northern plains,
And paler grow the colours on the grass,
The cornstalks bend beneath the filling grain :
The fruit-trees lose their flower robes of snow,
The tender leaves among the fruit appear ;
Thus Nature lets her children surely know
That Spring is over, and the Summer here.*

THIS BOUNTEOUS HERITAGE OF OURS

This bounteous heritage of ours,
In toil and sorrow won,
Still claims the sacrificial powers
Of each Australian son :
We tune our praise for lives fulfilled
In founding this, our nation,
And pledge our faith in truth to build
Befitting that foundation.

The teeming sea, the fruitful land,
The forest, plain and hill,
Yield precious gifts to every hand
That seeks with honest will :
Dear home of life renewed and strong,
Dear Land of Sunlit splendour !
Our burning hearts to thee belong,
Our best to thee we render.

And as the rolling years go by,
And cities spread afar,
Great God of mankind, lend thine eye
To be our guiding star ;
That to our country we may give
Our spirit's grand endeavour !
Blest land, where hope and love may live,
Australia, ours forever.

THE VICTOR'S SONG

The ring of the sabre, the roar of the gun,
Are silent once more on the field we have won ;
The moan of the wounded is drowned in our song,
And loud o'er our triumph rejoices the throng.
O Joy of the victory ! Glory and fame !
All hail to the honours that come to our name !
But hush ! Through the clamour I listen, and hear
The wail of the women, afar and anear—
“ Ah, woe is me, for my child is dead ! ”

Now let the World know that our heroes have
fought
This day like old Samson : our foes they made
naught !
Yea, courage died not when Achilles was slain,
Nor vanished when Nelson lay dead on the main.
To right and to left did our fusilade fall ;
We battered their trenches with shell and with
ball !—
Low murmur the wind in the grass at my side,
And ever its song like a wailing voice cried,
“ Ah, woe is me, for my child is dead ! ”

And soon we shall stand where our kindred await,
With laud for our courage, and thanks for our
fate ;
For mothers and sweethearts and sisters will come,
Each joyfully telling of welcome at home !
'Tis then that we taste of the pleasures of war
Which come to the soldier when fighting is o'er !—
But louder the wail 'mid the songs of delight,
“ Oh, pity us women who mourn in the night !
“ Ah, woe is me, for my child is dead ! ”

RED RAIN

The arum lily clustered near the door,
Her blossoms like soft bridal velvet folden,
A lovely robe, around the centre golden,
Her leaves a luscious verdure richly veined.
She was belovèd, tended and caressed,
The morning dew its loving-cup would pour
Upon her, and the clouds their bounty rained ;
Each evening incense floated from the west,
And Sunset glory was her radiant guest.

And thus her fair estate when fell the night ;
Down came the north wind in its fury bred
In central deserts flaming hot and red.
Then from the south a sea-born cloud went forth,
O'er hill and pasture, o'er the city street,
Hurling its crystal volleys from the height
To cool and cleanse this roysterer from the north.
The tempest raged, and on the housetops beat—
Then trickling runnels chanted the retreat.

At morn the lily clustered near the door :
But gone the bridal beauty of the flowers !
The howling fury of the midnight hours
Had wrung the desert dust from whirling air,
The rust-red dust, so like a bloody stain—
And fouled each virgin bloom so fair before,
With war's red dye, the token of despair !
So passed the victor, leaving in his train
The lily broken by the red, red rain.

DAWN

WRITTEN WHEN TAKING A NIGHT JOURNEY IN
THE TRAIN

Through the desert we sped, through the warm,
black night,

Weary, and wide awake,

'Mid the roar of the wheels, and the hissing of
steam,

And the scream of the grinding brake.

Then somebody cried, " See, the dawn is here,
" With its wings of silver grey ! "

And, bounding with pleasure, my heart awoke
At the coming of the day !

There shall come to my soul the great dawn of God,
And soft on my dulling ear
The voice of a comrade shall fall, who cries,
" See, the glowing morn is here ! "

And I shall be weary of travelling then ;
And how my heart will leap,
When that dawn from the hills of the glory land
O'er the night of life shall sweep.

THE CAPTURED RAINBOW

Gold of the morning glory,
Blue of the skies at noon,
Grey of the floating cloud-mist,
Sheen of the argent Moon.

Red of the glow of Sunset,
Green like the shallow sea,
Purple of Summer midnight—
Flash from the heart of thee.

Waratah, wattle, and violet
Gave of their beauty part,
So we behold their radiance
Living alight in thy heart.

Thou hast the rainbow captured
Ere it could melt and die,
Held in thy vase alabaster,
Ever to meet the eye.

Jewel so fair and spotless,
Type of all God-given things,
Ever more wondrous beauty
Forth from thy bosom springs !

FLOWER-THOUGHT—THE WARATAH

The gay waratah is a soldier bold,
With his tunic of glowing red,
He stiffens his back to a perfect line,
To carry his well-poised head :
He stands " At Attention " the long day through,
Nor turns from the " Eyes Front All ! "
Whatever the order, he's waiting there
To answer the soldier's call.

DECEMBER

*This last month of the year is harvest-tide,
When husbandmen receive what they have sown ;
From every farm upon the countryside
The reaping blades send out their busy drone :
Then, happy time, when from the paddocks borne,
The bounty of the Earth is safely stored,
And man can rest assured of plenteous corn
To fill the manger and supply the board.*

CHRISTMAS UP-TO-DATE

Old Father Christmas ! He was buried long ago ;
His grave was left in England underneath a pile
of snow :

He didn't die of sickness, but old age upon him
pressed,
So, quitting all his former claims, he went to his
long rest.

Old Father Christmas ! He grew foolish at the last,
And thought his jokes were welcome as they had
been in the past ;

His chimney trick for children only made them
smile and stare,

When so many wear no stockings, or no stockings
have to wear

Old Father Christmas was a pompous, silly fool,
As every clever youngster knew, who graced a desk
at school,

'Twas time he took himself away, with all his
cunning pack,

And people are too sensible to wish the humbug
back.

But stay ! Let me think again ! I fancy I remember
A merry caller at my door one morning last
December !

He wasn't old and hoary, and he didn't say a word
Of holly or of feasting, or of other things absurd.

He wore a flowing mantle green of fern and wattle
cool,
He bade me seek a restful day beside a mountain
pool ;
To have a little frolic where the sandy beaches dip
To take the kiss the wavelets bring from yonder
passing ship.

Who was the gentle visitor who came to me last
year ?
There's someone laughing happily, a whisper in
my ear :
“ Dad may be dead and buried, but not so his
youthful son !
“ For I am Christmas Up-to-date, and just as fond
of fun ! ”

THE IMMIGRANT

The King of sleep withdrew at dawn ;
I felt him vanish as I woke ;
For somewhere out beyond the lawn
A peal of bird-song broke.

And ere the Sun his cheery face
Had raised above the dusky east,
A thousand birds had found a place
At this melodious feast.

The leader of the feathered choir,
The blackbird, sent his liquid note
Rising and ringing ever higher,
From leafy parks remote.

I thought, " This little migrant came
" From where the oaks of England stand ;
" Yet, sings he joyously the same
" As in his native land ! "

" Of course," he said, " And why not, Friend ?
" For here are skies as bright as there,
" And food, and forests, without end,
" And not a Winter care ! "

More rapturous his praises grew,
His grateful lay for vanished night,
As if his joy no limit knew
In this fair home of light.

The kookaburra's laugh was heard,
The magpie fluted from his tree,
The blackbird sang, and not a bird
Was half so glad as he.

ECSTASY

My belovèd is fair as the lilies that float
And gaze at themselves in the water's bright sheen ;
Her voice is as sweet as the reed-warbler's note,
Oft heard by the creek where the rushes are green.

My belovèd has borrowed from dawning its hues,
To paint her fair cheek like the flower, where sips
The butterfly feasting on honey and dews :
And eventide glory has painted her lips.

My belovèd hath eyes like the sky of the north,
Invisibly deep in their shadowy grey ;
But in this new heaven the stars that beam forth
Are answering fires my passion to sway.

My belovèd has fingers that tenderly twine
As clematis streamers about the tall tree ;
And so is her life intermingled with mine
That he who would part us must rend her or me.

My belovèd is clad in the daintiest white,
That rivals the loveliness on her smooth brow
Of innocent glory and purity's light
Set there by an angel, God's grace to avow.

My belovèd is never unwilling to rest
Her soft, yellow tresses right close to my heart ;
And when her sweet lips by my own are caressed,
She hides not the pleasure my kisses impart.

'Tis thus that I know that my darling is mine ;
I know that she loves me most dearly on Earth ;
And when the grieved tears on her long lashes
shine,

My voice and my kisses can change them to mirth.

My belovèd was sent me, a gift from above !
Are all things from Heaven so beauteous and sweet ?
So blest and so happy am I in her love,
That life has a glad note for every heart beat !

Would you heed if I told you my darling's dear
name ?

Ah Women, you know, or can guess, what it is !
My sweet, my belovèd from Paradise came
To make me a mother, and crown me with bliss.

THE LIGHTING OF THE HOME FIRE

A FINLAND FABLE

The long midwinter night had come,
And ice had sealed the lakes ;
The Earth lay muffled in the snow
And still the woods and brakes.
The wretched people huddled close
Throughout the fearsome night ;
For Demon Darkness held the sway,
And he would brook no light.

With plenteous oil the lamps were filled,
The wicks were neatly trimmed ;
But fast as rose the cheering flame,
Its welcome light was dimmed :
Each time the door would swing, the Fiend
With mighty puffs would blow,
Till every lamp was dead and cold,
And not a spark did show.

“What shall we do? the people cried,
As, crouching in the dark,
They felt the Demon’s chilling breath,
And watched the dying spark ;
A silent hand upon the latch !
A beam that lit the night !
“Let Darkness quench the lamps, but I
“Will bring you back the light !”

The Demon passed from house to house,
On wicked mischief bent,
And at his heels the Spirit Bright
Around the village went :
And fast as Darkness puffed and blew
To blacken every flame,
So to the homes of wretched men
The Fay of Brightness came.

“This will not do,” the Bright One cried,
“We’ll stop his game malign !
“Get splintered wood, and bind it round
To make a torch of pine !”
’Twas done ; but still the Evil One
With swelling cheeks returned,
And where he passed, a mighty breath
Quenched every torch that burned.

“Ho Ho !” he laughed, and shook the house,
And made the forests roar,
“These puny children of the Earth
“Will try the torch no more !”
And on he swaggered. Then the Light
Stole in with counsel fair ;
“Fill up the furnace box with wood,
“And set it burning there !”

With crackle and with ruddy glare,
The fire licked round the fuel,
Like rapier flexible they used
Of old time in a duel :
Soon was the chamber full of light,
And grateful men drew near,
And blessed the Spirit good and wise,
For hope and warmth and cheer.

The Demon saw, and raging wild,
Down on the houses swooped ;
He open burst the bolted doors,
And 'neath the lintels stooped :
With lungs expanded to their full,
He puffed and puffed the fire ;
But every blast that smote the flames
But made them climb the higher.

With howls he fled, and sought the woods,
Where he might puff and roar ;
The Fairy laughed a merry peal,
As fast he locked the door :
“ Out there, Old Demon, you may howl,
“ And on the mountains roam !
“ But men have learned to keep alight
“ The fire, and this is home ! ”

THE WILD PANSY

NORTHERN VICTORIA

Star of the Summer-burnt plain,
With rosy and smiling eye,
Staring the Sun in his fiercest mood,
Braving the scorching sky.

Evening may scatter her stars
To light up her ceiling grey ;
Thou art the star of the noontide heat,
Bright little star of day.

Out of the unshowered sod
Thy merry pink eye will peep ;
But soon as the Autumn rains cool the plains,
Summer-stars fall asleep.

Often my weary eye scans
The paddock all bare and browned,
Where never a blade or leaf of green
Rises above the ground.

And there thou art, smiling and sweet,
With eventide hues aglow,
The brave little friend of the burning days,
While other friends shelter below.

Thou art the symbol of those
Who stand by our side to cheer,
When blasts from the furnace of sorrow quell
Even the comforting tear.

Like to the love of a friend
That bloometh in spite of shame,
That withereth not at the searing touch
Of a soiled and tarnished fame.

Thanks, little Flower, to thee,
For smiles 'mid the Summer's dearth ;
And may I remember thy beauty meek
When Spring flowers garnish the Earth.

FLOWER-THOUGHT—THE CLEMATIS

In youth we clung together,
Our bridal wreaths entwined ;
In age our whitened tresses
The same sweet thought enshrined :
Though with the passing Summer
We vanished on the wind,
'Twas ours, O best Belovèd,
To be through life entwined.

AN APPRECIATION

FROM DR. HELEN KELLER

Doubtless, readers are acquainted with Dr. Helen Keller, perhaps the most famous and best beloved of all America's women, who, in spite of the loss of sight and hearing in her infancy, has overcome all difficulties by brains, courage, and industry. Recently Miss Aston sent a copy of her little book, "Singable Songs," transcribed into the Braille system of reading for the blind, as a gift to Miss Keller, and the distinguished American lady responded in the following beautiful letter of appreciation :

DEAR MISS ASTON,—

Your lovely little book, "Singable Songs," welcomed me here when I returned to Forest Hills a few weeks ago, after a holiday of fifteen months in Scotland. I am grieved beyond words, that such a darling gift should have remained so long unacknowledged, but when you understand the cause I trust you will accept my grateful thanks for the joy you have given me. It is a joy like the exquisite fragrance of the petal shower falling upon the child's hair in your poem.

I cannot realise that darkness encompasses you about as a nest when your songs sparkle through my fingers in dots of light ! Indeed, there are many lines in which my heart beats a sympathetic chime with your own. It seems as if "Unsatisfied" had been written for me, it

expresses with such fitting grace "The strong, insatiable discontent" I feel when my uttered words come halting and slow, and my prayer that my hand one day may

"Touch that mystic thing I seek,
And chains of thwarted effort shall be riven ;
Then, having climbed my mountain's glorious
peak,
I shall behold, and understand, and speak.—"

There is another bond between us in our love of the eucalyptus. When I was in California, where the eucalyptus grows in magnificent groves, I used to stand among them with my fingers revelling, in the music of their leaves, inhaling their perfume with intense delight.

I hope I may some day visit Australia, and walk along its plains in Springtime, of which your poems give me enchanting glimpses. . . .

With cordial greetings and all good wishes,
I am, sincerely yours,

HELEN KELLER.

October 31st, 1934.



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